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DEMOCRACY AND EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

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Democracy is not just a set of values by which we might want to assess the adequacy of any environmental governance arrangements. Rather, democracy proves integral to effective earth system governance. Thinking effectively about democracy here requires moving beyond the ecologically problematic history of the liberal democratic states that currently populate a large part of the world, and a still larger part of the imagination of many of those who think about democracy. But even if it supplies no compelling normative models, this history does hold many lessons. After looking at some of these lessons, I will undertake a more analytical treatment of democracy and earth system governance, with some applications to climate change. Earth systems need to be matched by deliberative systems; it is in connection with deliberative democracy that environmental democracy can most profitably be pursued. There is now a substantial literature on deliberative democracy and the environment (Smith 2003; Baber and Bartlett 2005). Rather than go over the various arguments for the efficacy of deliberation in facilitating the expression of environmental values, in this paper I will stress the way the lessons of experience can be used to inform a systemic way of thinking about deliberative democracy and environmental governance.

I will take it as more or less given that most of those who think very hard about politics and the environment now come down on the side of democracy in some form or another as being preferable to more authoritarian alternatives. Times have changed since the 1970s, when the discourse of limits and survival was often accompanied by advocacy of authoritarian politics – government by a ‘class of ecological mandarins’, as Ophuls (1977: 163) put it (see also works by Robert Heilbroner and Garrett Hardin, among others, from the same era). There is still the occasional echo of this kind of thinking (for climate change in particular, see Shearman and Smith 2007). However, it now seems mostly confined to those who, whatever their sophistication when it comes to ecological systems, are fairly innocent when it comes to knowledge of how political systems, and in particular authoritarian political systems, actually work. An effective ecological oligarchy would involve placing massive power in the hands of those not motivated by the possession of power. This oligarchy could not be established through elections, because then it would be hostage to potentially non-ecological electoral considerations. Its effective functioning would depend on minimizing economic constraint on government decisions caused by the presence of a market economy, a steadfastness of purpose through thick and thin, a degree of omniscience that would lead to correct decisions being dictated from the top down that are applicable to all social and ecological circumstances,

and a disciplined hierarchical bureaucracy committed to implementing central decisions. All of these requirements are implausible in today's world.

Lessons from the Environmental Performance of States

Through much of its history, democracy has been associated with states. This is especially true of representative democracy. Representatives are elected by, and accountable to, the citizens of a state (or some sub-unit such as a regional or local government whose existence and whose elections are authorized by states). While this history does not provide us with any well-functioning model of what an ecologically adequate political system would look like, it does provide us with some lessons that should inform thinking about the shape that ecological democracy could take.

The first lesson is that liberal democratic states generally do better than their authoritarian counterparts. While a broadly accepted generalization, this relationship is actually harder to establish with confidence than it might at first appear. The problem is that liberal democracy is associated with prosperity, and the more prosperous a state (once it passes a problematic middle stage), the better its environmental performance – this is the so-called 'environmental Kuznets curve'. So disentangling the relative influence of prosperity and democracy is quite hard.

The second lesson can be stated with a bit more confidence. Among liberal democratic states, consensual democracies (whose home is Northern Europe and Japan) out-perform their Anglo-American adversarial counterparts. An inspection of the environmental performance league tables issued by the World Economic Forum shows the top positions occupied by European consensual democracies. (The rankings are online at www.ciesin.org/indicators/ESI/rank.html). Scruggs (2001) finds that there is a strong positive association between degree of corporatism and environmental policy performance. Corporatism involves consensual policy making by representatives of peak business and labor organizations and government executives. There is no agreement on the components of environmental performance indicators, but there is some convergence across the findings of studies using somewhat different sorts of indicators, giving some degree of convergent validity to these findings (for further comparative studies, see Jänicke 1992, Jahn 1998).

The tricky part here is identifying just what is responsible for the relatively good performance of consensual democracies. It could be the openness of their political systems to serious accommodation of a variety of social values – such as environmental concern. It could be their economic systems: consensual democracies tend to have what Hall and Soskice (2001) call cooperative market economies, while adversarial democracies tend to have competitive market economies. Relatedly, it could be that market-oriented neo-liberalism has made much greater inroads in the Anglo-American adversarial democracies than in consensual democracies; so it is neo-liberalism and its single-minded pursuit of efficiency and growth rather than adversarial democracy which are to blame for poor environmental performance. Consensual democracy is however no defense against neo-liberalism – if all parties agree on the need for neo-liberalism (for example, neo-liberalism in the UK and New Zealand was promoted and pursued when in office by parties of the left and right, so if they had been consensual rather than adversarial democracies, that fact may have made no difference).

Another possibility is that consensual systems are more deliberative: that is, politics involves a greater ratio of communicative action to strategic action than in adversarial democracies. Steiner et al (2004) find in their comparative study of parliamentary debates that consensual democracies such as Switzerland and Germany feature substantially higher quality deliberation than adversarial democracies such as the United States and United Kingdom. Their finding is based on the careful application of a ‘discourse quality index’ that codes all interventions in debates on a number of criteria derived from Habermas’s account of communicative action, and then sums the scores and divides by the number of interventions to get an average for the debate as a whole.

Deliberative, communicative action ought in theory to promote environmental values because in such action, argument is effective to the degree it proceeds in terms generalizable to all parties concerned (Dryzek 1987: 204-5). Ecological values are examples (of course not the only examples) of such values, so there is every reason to expect such values to come to the fore to the degree interchange is deliberative. Evidence from designed deliberative ‘mini-publics’ composed of ordinary citizens on environmental issues frequently shows that deliberation among participants induces such a ‘green shift’. So for example Fishkin (2009: 124) trumpets the deliberative polls held on energy issues in Texas and Louisiana. After deliberating on the energy supply issue, the citizen participants came down decisively on the side of greater investment in renewable energy and conservation – and the Texas state government adopted some of the recommendations. Dryzek, Goodin, Tucker and Reber (2009) show that reflective mini-publics organized on the issue of genetically modified foods in many countries almost always come to conclusions that are more precautionary than the Promethean commitments of political elites, who are much more inclined to favor GM agriculture as an ingredient of conventional economic growth. Niemeyer (2004) reports a citizen jury whose deliberations induced the participants, initially willing to allow an illegal road bulldozed through a wilderness area to stay open, to favor closing the road on environmental grounds.

In addition, a particular kind of discourse ought to flourish in environmental affairs in relatively consensual systems – that of ecological modernization. Ecological modernization puts economic growth and environmental conservation in a potentially positive-sum relationship. Pollution indicates inefficient materials usage. ‘Pollution prevention pays’ because less pollution means a happier, healthier, and more productive society whose economy can prosper based on green technologies. (For a comprehensive treatment of ecological modernization, see Mol, Sonnenfeld, and Spaargaren 2009.) The win-win character of ecological modernization discourse means it ought to flourish in consensual systems, precisely because such solutions appear capable of meeting the key concerns of all sides on environmental issues (not just those of a temporary majority). It is no coincidence that ecological modernization had its origins in the Netherlands and Germany, was quickly adopted in the Nordic countries and Japan (if not by that name), and has made slower progress elsewhere. Some countries remain stuck in a zero-sum confrontation between economy and environment – in the United States case, the terms of the standoff were established in the early 1970s and have changed little since (Bryner 2000: 277)

Before going overboard in celebration of the environmental performance of consensual democracies some words of caution are in order. To begin, however

impressive their performance may be in comparative terms, this does not imply that the performance of even the best performer among them is actually adequate in ecological terms. This proposition is harder to test empirically, and detailed study of the state of the environment of a country may be much more instructive here than summary indicators of the sort that form the basis for international league tables. The easiest way to test this proposition would be to take a close look at the countries that normally come at the top in the league tables (especially those produced for the World Economic Forum). Finland in particular stands out. Is Finland an adequate performer? It has a dubious record when it comes to forest policy (important in a country which is mostly forest). Its relatively low level of greenhouse gas emissions (and other pollutants) may, like most other Western countries, be achieved as a result of the fact that most of the manufactured goods it consumes are produced in poorer countries with lax environmental standards. Thus it falls prey to the ubiquitous tendency to displace problems somewhere else, in this case, spatially (Dryzek 1987: 16-18). Plumwood (2002: 72-80) refers to this as the production of remoteness in the negative environmental consequences of decisions made for the material benefit of the privileged.

There are other ubiquitous tendencies that contribute to the ecological irrationality of all liberal democratic states, be they consensual or adversarial. These include short time horizons that stem from the electoral cycle meaning that environmental damage felt in the future from present decisions is discounted. Correspondingly, environmental policies whose positive effects will only be felt in the long term are obstructed. In addition, mass public opinion may only move decisively in the direction of action on an environmental problem when its effects are large, visible, and immediate; but by then it may be too late. This is what Giddens (2009) calls, guess what, “Giddens’s paradox”, though it had of course been common wisdom in environmental studies for several decades before Lord Giddens so thoughtfully gave the problem its new name.

A more subtle analysis of both the ecological effectiveness of consensual states and its limits is made possible by taking a look at historical dynamics. Consider the environmental histories of Norway and (West) Germany, as analyzed in Dryzek et al (2003). Norway exemplifies the actively inclusive consensual state. Formations that in other countries inspire and constitute social movements are in Norway integrated into the state from the very beginning. So from the early 1970s, environmentalists participated in key policy making committees, and were funded by government. The membership of these organizations has always been tiny, as they do not need members. While all this may look exemplary, what it means is that Norway can institutionalize only moderate forms of environmentalism and ecological modernization. In contrast, Germany for a long time featured a lively green public sphere mobilizing large numbers of activists, organizations, and ecological research institutes at a distance from the state. Until the mid 1980s, Germany’s corporatist system of government was closed to environmentalists (and other social movements outside the traditional corporatist triumvirate of government executives, business, and labor). It was in Germany’s oppositional green public sphere that some of the most profound and thoroughgoing green critiques of the political economy were generated. Since the mid-1980s many activists have made the long march through the institutions from oppositional public sphere to state institutions, as Germany’s corporatist system opened up. But many of these activists carried at least a memory of radical critique.

If the performance of even the best consensual states is ecologically inadequate, then such radical critique is a necessity. And if consensual states cannot generate this kind of critique themselves, they must import it from elsewhere. Or to put it slightly differently, in a way that will support some generalizations I will make in a moment, effective environmental governance benefits from both deliberative empowered space and public space at a critical distance.

To the Deliberative System

Environmental governance need not be tied to the idea of a sovereign state. The history of environmental thinking casts substantial doubt on the adequacy of the state form in an ecological context. Certainly if, as Eckersley (2004) points out, the state is the most important kind of repository of authority in today's world, then as a practical matter is important to think about what a green state might look like – and for Eckersley, it would be very different from any existing state. But we can actually accommodate this possibility while allowing that other sorts of authority are both possible and consequential. For example, increasing importance is attached by many public policy analysts to networked governance that can occur in the shadow of the state, but sometimes escapes central state control, and sometimes extends across state boundaries. A second relevant locus is global governance, for which the state proves to be a poor normative model. Other forms include various normative institutional proposals from green political thinking – such as bioregionalism.

I have already argued that in thinking about democracy for earth system governance, a deliberative conception of democracy is most appropriate. What we now need is a way of thinking about deliberative democracy in an environmental context that can accommodate the many kinds of political arrangements I have just summarized. This way of thinking should also make this accommodation in a way that builds upon the empirical evidence about the performance of states (and other entities) that I discussed in the previous section. The notion of a *deliberative system* fulfils the requirement here. This notion was first introduced by Mansbridge (1999). Subsequent treatments by Parkinson (2006), Hendriks (2006) and Goodin (2005) were also closely tied to the institutions of a liberal democratic state. A more generally applicable conceptualization of a deliberative system (presented initially in Dryzek 2009) proceeds with the following elements, as follows. This conception can be applied to governance with any degree of 'stateness', at any level from the local to the global.

1. *Public Space*. In public space a diversity of viewpoints and discourses can interact, ideally without legal restriction. Discourses might be engaged by activists, social movements, journalists, bloggers, or ordinary citizens. Spaces might exist or be created in connection with, for example, physical spaces (classrooms, bars, cafés), virtual spaces (internet forums), public hearings, and designed citizen forums.
2. *Empowered space*. Empowered space is where authoritative collective decisions get produced, and can feature, for example, legislatures, constitutional courts, corporatist councils, empowered stakeholder dialogues, or international organizations. Empowered space in some kinds of governance arrangements may take on more informal character (for example, in many of the cases of community-based governance of common pool resources described by Ostrom (1990)).

3. *Transmission*. Public space can influence empowered space through for example political campaigns, the argument and rhetoric of political activists, and cultural change initiated by social movements that eventually changes the outlooks of those in empowered space.
4. *Accountability*. Democratic legitimacy requires that empowered space be held accountable to public space. The most common means within democratic states is through elections, though these are not necessarily very deliberative affairs. Deliberative accountability means, quite literally, having to give an account; it does not have to involve the possibility of sanction through, for example, removal from office.
5. *Meta-Deliberation*. Meta-deliberation is the reflexive capacity of those in the deliberative system to contemplate the way the deliberative system is itself organized, and if necessary change its structure. As Thompson (2008: 15) puts it, not all practices and arrangements need to be deliberative all the time, but they do need to be justifiable in deliberative terms.
6. *Decisiveness*. The deliberative system should be consequential when it comes to the content of collective outcomes. That is, deliberation should not be a sideshow that obscures where key decisions actually get made. This sixth aspect drives home the idea that democratic deliberation should be consequential as well as authentic and inclusive.

As already stressed, this kind of thinking can be applied to all kinds of settings, including those where sovereign authority is absent. Consider in this light the exchange between Sabel, Fung, and Karkkainen (1999) and Lowi (1999) on the desirability of local collaborative (networked) arrangements for environmental governance. Sabel et al celebrate the accomplishments of collaboration in moving past the impasses in US politics that are generated as a result of the number of veto points in the system. Lowi castigates collaborative arrangements as a low-visibility privatization of public authority: bargains between private actors, replacing principled public debate and the high-visibility public action that Lowi believes ought to characterize politics. Ever since his classic book *The End of Liberalism* (Lowi 1969), Lowi has stressed the degree to which policy making authority ought to be concentrated in legislatures, and not parceled out to administrators and interest groups. Though he does not use the language of deliberative democracy, Lowi advocates a deliberative system where empowered space should be 100% occupied by the legislature.

Lowi is fighting a rearguard action in a world in which networked governance seems to be on the rise. Political theory must, contra Lowi, adjust to this 'post-Westphalian' world (Braithwaite 2007). To begin, we can think of networks themselves as deliberative systems. The key to their democratization may be a differentiation of empowered space and public space within the network, and the presence of contestation within public space. Such contestation can be impeded by discursive hegemony; so it is important to have multiple and contesting discourses, engaged by all those affected by network decisions (or their representatives). In looking at empirical examples, it is much easier to find cases where these principles are violated than when they are exemplified. Social movements, one obvious source of contestation, often eschew governance networks. So for example Hendriks (2008: 1018) points out that in the case of a network

that exists to oversee transition to more sustainable energy policy in the Netherlands, environmentalists (notably Greenpeace) chose to devote their restricted resources to lobbying in Parliament and the European Union. The democratic deficit of governance networks, in environmental affairs and elsewhere, may be due to discursive hegemony and associated lack of contestation. This problem reached a peak in global financial networks prior to the crash of 2008. Such public space as did exist was populated by financial journalists and other cheerleaders for the dominant discourse. Criticism of the system that did occur was at an irrelevant distance with absolutely no impact on the production of collective outcomes in the network. While there may be nothing wrong in systemic deliberative terms with consensual governance in empowered space, it must be linked to contestation in public space.

An Application: The Global Governance of Climate Change

These ideas about democracy as an inclusive, authentic, and consequential deliberative system can, as I have said, be applied at any level, to any kind of issue. I will now give an extended example concerning the currently most prominent such issue (indeed one which sometimes threatens to frame all contemporary environmental issues), the global governance of climate change. It is possible to describe the existing governance arrangements in deliberative terms, evaluate their adequacy in the same terms, and identify ways to improve these arrangements. The following analysis is based on a research project in which my co-investigator is Hayley Stevenson. This research is very much still in progress, so the account should be regarded as tentative.

Public space is populated by many actors and interests. They include civil society organizations, activists of various sorts, scientists (including those gathered under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), journalists, bloggers, public officials working for states and international organizations, and corporations. But rather than enumerate actors and their perspectives, it is much more straightforward to identify the discourses that operate within and contest public space (for a partial treatment focusing on forests as carbon sinks, see Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006; for a broader scale history, see Hajer and Versteeg forthcoming). However there is a particular challenge when it comes to climate change that is clarified if we compare it with the case studies that appear in three classics of environmental discourse analysis. For Litfin (1994) there are essentially only two discourses on the ozone issue, and a precautionary discourse eventually prevails in the 1987 Montreal protocol. For Hajer (1995) there are only two discourses on acid rain, traditional-pragmatist and ecological modernization. For Epstein (2008) there are only two discourses in the history of whaling, anti-whaling and pro-whaling (though the latter takes very different forms in the bygone era of industrial whaling and the more recent attempts to re-institute substantial whaling). For climate change, a much larger number of discourses proliferates, and even classifying the discursive territory is a major challenge. Newcomers keep arriving. Relevant discourses include:

1. *Ecological limits*. Climate change exemplifies the cumulative sum of human stresses on natural systems, threatening to overshoot the carrying capacity of those systems. Natural scientists have been especially prominent in articulating this discourse.
2. *Promethean* discourse, the diametric opposite to limits, which asserts that human ingenuity will always be able to overcome alleged scarcities, especially when that

ingenuity is organized through markets, and all ecological resources receive a market price. Thus economists have played an important role (though some economists have departed from Promethean discourse because they see unregulated markets failing when it comes to climate change).

3. *Energy security* under which states seek validation in international agreements for their own mix of energy sources – and energy exports. This discourse is only obliquely related to climate change as an ecological problem, but nevertheless is an important force.
4. *Radical transformation* that seeks wholesale change in patterns of production and consumption, and an alternative to the neo-liberal international political economy. This is a radical green discourse.
5. *Denial* that climate change exists – or if it does exist, that it is caused by human activity, or that it is really anything to worry about.
6. *Ecological modernization* places economic growth and environmental protection in a potentially positive sum relationship – “pollution prevention pays”, as a popular slogan puts it. Ecological modernization goes by that name very explicitly in Northern Europe, but rarely elsewhere, even among those who subscribe to it. So Nobel Laureate Al Gore can be located in this discourse, even though he does not use the term to describe his position. While ecological modernization (like Promethean discourse) places great faith in technology, it does not believe the requisite technological change will just happen in unregulated markets. Instead, coordinated collective action is necessary – for example, to put a price on carbon emissions. The landmark reports on climate change produced by economists Nicholas Stern in the United Kingdom and Ross Garnaut in Australia can therefore be classified under ecological modernization. A weak version of this discourse can end up validating a search for options whose first priority is not damaging profits and the existing energy mix – such as dubious ‘clean coal’ technology. A stronger version can contemplate structural change in the political economy.
7. *Climate justice* is a fairly recent addition to the scene, and highlights several different kinds of justice claim. Developing countries argue the injustice of wealthy countries that built their economies on a long history of high fossil fuel use now seeking to deny poorer countries that option. Within developing countries such as India, environmentalists can accuse their own wealthy elites of ‘hiding behind the poor’ in a way that will enable the elite to continue its own high-carbon lifestyle. Across all countries, those who suffer most from climate change (for example, low-lying coastal residents, climate refugees) have claims against those most responsible for causing it. Across generations, justice demands taking into account the interests of future generations, not just present ones. Finally, justice claims can be made by those asked to bear a heavy burden as a result of mitigation, be they coal miners, fossil fuel exporters, or people who rely for their livelihood on forests affected by REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) schemes.

All of these discourses – and possibly others I have not mentioned - yield grist for public space. However, it should be remembered that ideally their interplay should be inclusive and authentic, engaged by a broad variety of actors in competent fashion. Sometimes public space is not at all like this, featuring as it does slack and misleading

media coverage, journalistic sensationalism, corporate spin, and occasional demonization of opponents. On the other hand, some positives are worth noting. In contrast with global financial matters (until the 2008 crash), there is no domination by a single hegemonic discourse. Global finance was dominated by market liberalism, with a core hypothesis of efficient markets. Public space was occupied almost entirely by cheerleaders in the financial media for efficient markets and the wealth they could generate. Such critics as did exist were not engaged by the cheerleaders.

With time, changes in the configuration of discourses and the terms of its engagement can be observed. The discourse of denial still exists, but it has been abandoned by some of those who once championed it. The defectors even include several large energy corporations (indeed, even the displacement of the term oil company by energy corporation signals change), who have adopted ecological modernization. The ‘Gloabate Climate Coalition’ of corporate denialists was disbanded in 2002 after too many defections. The high visibility, high stakes, and opportunities it offers for the advance and defense of so many concerns means that global public space in the deliberative system for climate change features active engagement by multiple actors. There may still be massive failures in this system, but public space is not where they are concentrated (again the contrast with the global financial system is striking).

Global Authority on Climate Change

Let me turn now to *empowered space*. Identifying the elements of empowered space is relatively straightforward, locating much in the way of authentic deliberation is harder (but not necessarily impossible).

The series of conferences organized under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change look as though they ought to be a core feature of empowered space, oriented as they are to the production of agreement that then gets implemented. A great deal also turns on the degree to which these negotiations feature arguing rather than bargaining. Bargaining is not deliberative, and can be modeled most straightforwardly in strategic terms, as the representatives of states announce positions, offer inducements, and make threats (concealed or overt) in order to try to get an outcome that meets their own self-interest as far as possible. Arguing, in contrast, can be deliberative (though it does not have to be), especially if arguments are made in terms of common interests or principles that transcend the self-interest of the negotiator’s state. Further empirical inquiry is required to determine the proportions of arguing and bargaining, and the degree to which arguing is deliberative. This empirical inquiry should look not just for argument in common interest or principled terms, but also for any kind of communication that is non-coercive, connects particular interests to more general concerns, and induces reflection on the part of those who receive it. In a different context, Risse (2000) has found that there can be a substantial degree of communicative (as opposed to strategic) action in international negotiations – even on issues concerning national and international security, which pose tougher deliberative challenges than climate change.

If we do observe what seems to be principled arguing rather than bargaining, it may be in terms that happen to serve a negotiator’s state. We should not be surprised to see developing countries using the language of climate justice. But we should never underestimate the power of what Elster (1998: 12) calls the ‘civilizing force of hypocrisy’. The public exchange itself may come to proceed in terms of the principles,

and so the principles take effect. This effect may happen irrespective of the initial motivations of the negotiators – who may indeed eventually come to believe in the principles and discourses in whose terms they have been arguing.

The UNFCCC negotiations can sometimes constitute a bubble, and those inside may feel that what they do is of crucial importance. But empowered space may extend beyond the bubble. In other international issue areas, such as trade, we find global governmental organizations that can exercise decisive authority – such as the World Trade Organization. There is nothing comparable when it comes to climate change; there is no World Environment Organization (for arguments for and against a WEO, see Biermann and Bauer 2005).

In the absence of any such organizations, the key political actors in empowered space in the global system are states as they exercise discretionary authority. Any international agreements reached under the UNFCCC will have to be put into effect through the policy choices of states. Failure here is quite possible: many of the states that signed up to the 1997 Kyoto protocol fell well short of the emission reduction target to which they had committed.

States may also take globally consequential actions that have little or nothing to do with UNFCCC agreements. This is especially true of the very big emitters: China, India, the United States, and European Union (not a state but sometimes able to behave a bit like one). At the UNFCCC negotiations, China adopts a ‘development first’ negotiating position. But it shows some signs of adopting policies at home that will mitigate emissions nonetheless.

It is possible to imagine a global deliberative system in which empowered space is fully occupied by states acting in discretionary fashion, such that democratic transnational interchange would exist only in the public space of global civil society. In international environmental affairs, empowered space is poorly institutionalized at any level above the state. What this means is that discourses themselves can be powerful coordinating structures. The last two decades and more of global environmental affairs have been largely governed by the discourse of sustainable development (ecological modernization is also part of the sustainability family) – and ‘governed’ in this case has a literal meaning. Sustainable development discourse affects and sometimes coordinates multitudes of decisions made by states and other levels of government (regional and local), and partially compensates for the lack of formal institutions to coordinate across states. The implication is that a state can generate a degree of transnational democratic legitimacy for its policies to the degree it is responsive to the engagement of discourses in public space in a transnational deliberative system.

Transmission, Accountability, and Meta-Deliberation

The means of *transmission* from the engagement of discourses in public space to empowered space are many and varied. The UNFCCC negotiations are followed by a travelling show of activists; but despite their close physical presence, it may be quite hard for activists to get their arguments heard by negotiators tied up around the clock with each other. But it is not just through arguments that transmission occurs: it is also through the use of rhetoric by actors in public space actors, skillful use of the media, performances and demonstrations. Transmission to negotiators may be through the governments that negotiators represent. And given that states remain the most important

actors in the putative deliberative system for the global governance of climate change, actors in public space can target state governments directly. The means include involvement in election campaigns (to influence candidates, parties, and the positions they take), and all the well-known ways in which civil society actors can influence the governments of states.

Accountability can be a bit of a problem. Within states, the main accountability mechanism is that of elections, as voters can hold governments to account for their actions. In the global governance of climate change, of course elections do not exist, and national elections make very little contribution to transnational accountability. More generally, states governments are rarely called to account for their acts of commission and omission in relation to global concerns; they always have a national interest defense that can cover up any failures to respond to concerns emanating from public space. Failing that, they can always blame other states or international processes for their own deficiencies. In short, accountability within the global deliberative system is currently weak.

Meta-deliberation is also conspicuous by its absence. There is no developed reflexive capacity to work on the deliberative system itself. In one sense this is not surprising because no important actors explicitly conceive of the global governance of climate change in the systemic deliberative terms set out here. Perhaps more surprising is the weakness of conversation about the deficiencies of the UNFCCC processes themselves. With the failure of a 1996 attempt to adopt voting, the negotiations proceed with no formal decision rule for collective choice. The fallback is acquiescence and accommodation: any party can object to any clause, so language must be found to accommodate the objection (or some other way found to neutralize the objection). This may not necessarily be a bad thing from a deliberative point of view; as persuading all key actors on any point will surely facilitate agreement. But whatever the conclusion one reaches on this issue, more contemplation of the formal and informal rules governing the negotiations would be desirable. Equally desirable would be more contemplation of the absence of formal environmental institutions at the global system level. To put it crudely, if there is no World Environment Organization, such global environmental policy as does exist in global organizations will be made by the WTO and the World Bank. Again there is a striking contrast with global economic affairs, where there has been substantial global contemplation of institutional structure over the years (even though it has not always been very deliberative).

Even in the attenuated form resulting from these failures of transmission, accountability, and meta-deliberation, the global deliberative system on climate change often fails to be *decisive*. Governments that publicly proclaim their commitments to combating climate change often do very little when it comes to adopting policies that might actually do something significant. Energy corporations that have failed in public space may exert power behind the scenes upon states in order to secure the fossil fuel economy (and their own profits), and to divert policy in such a way that it will highlight symbolic and expensive action (offsets) rather than simple and effective remedies (carbon tax).

In short, despite the vitality of public space, the deliberative system for the global governance of climate change is in considerable disrepair. This is bad news for the

democratic legitimation of global action. It is equally bad news for the possibility of effective global action on the climate change issue.

If there were a greater capacity for meta-deliberation, what should be on its agenda? There is a movement for global democratization in general (not just on the climate change issue) – academics and a sprinkling of activists and politicians. This is not the place to look at all the various proposals that have been made. Suffice to say that too many of them start with the institutions of a liberal democratic state, and use them as a model for what should exist at the global level (for example, an elected parliamentary assembly as proposed by the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, constitutional structure, separation of powers, a framework of cosmopolitan law to which all institutions would be accountable). There are so many practical problems with this kind of approach (opposition from China and the United States, for a start). It would be far better to take a more open-minded approach to the elements of global deliberative system and contemplate possible ways to reform them. That is the task of meta-deliberation. So the first need is for a reflexive, meta-deliberative capacity.

Post-Autistic Political Ecology

Earth system governance is concerned with the governance of socio-ecological systems. The kinds of deliberative systems sketched so far in this paper have only human voices in them. But they can be extended to more explicit contemplation of the need to attend more closely to the current inability of human governance systems to respond effectively to what is going on in ecological systems. Now, this may be simply a defining feature of the earth system governance agenda in general, rather than any concern of democracy in particular. But a deliberative angle can make a contribution here.

Consider, for example, proposals for bioregional authority (for example, McGinnis 1998). The whole idea of bioregionalism is to embed human social, economic, and governance systems more deeply in ecological systems. This is not just a matter of redrawing political boundaries to coincide more closely with ecological boundaries (such as watersheds). Bioregionalists themselves mostly recognize that the kind of political, economic, and social activity that then takes place within (and across) bioregions needs to be ecologically attuned, and be guided by a sense of place. Like many deep green thinkers, they often invoke transformed consciousness and changed values as part of the mix. But changed consciousness and values will only go so far without changed structure. Bioregions would need a deliberative system but – crucially – a deliberative system that is open to communications from the non-human world.

Here there is a lot of problematic anthropocentric thinking in the history of democracy to overcome. In electoral democracy, the only entities that get represented are individual humans. In liberalism, the only locus of moral considerability is the individual human. Put these two together in electoral liberal democracy, and it is not obvious how interactions with ecological systems fit in – except as they impinge upon individual human interests. Because it emphasizes communicative systems, deliberative democracy is much better placed than aggregative democracy to contemplate admitting into democracy communications that do not necessarily have their sources within human societies. Deliberative democracy is not just about speaking, it is also about listening (see Bickford 1996); and that can include listening to signals from the non-human world (Dryzek 1995).

There is an autistic political ecology to overcome here. Its membership is composed of all those who treat human social and political life as a realm of symbolic action that has no counterpart in the non-human world. For example, for the early Habermas, the goal of critical theory was to prevent interactions between humans becoming like human interaction with the non-human world, which for Habermas can only be the object of instrumental action. If 'nature' is only a word and a concept found in human communication, then nature itself can be treated as a social construction. For some postmodernists this means that nature is a subcategory of culture, though others who point to the social construction of nature and more guarded and try to retain environmental concern (for example, Cronon 1995). This is not the place to deal with all such arguments, so let me just point to the excellent discussion in Eckersley (2004: 119-27), who points out that even if claims to know nature objectively are problematic, that does not mean all subjective claims and representations about nature are of equal validity. They can be tested in intersubjective communication of the sort that deliberative democrats (among others) prize. Even if the claims of nature can only enter the deliberative system through representations by human agents, it is far better that those representations are made than simply dismissed as social constructions in the name of some dubious social meta-theory. Thus for environmental governance we can add a seventh element to the logical requirements of a deliberative system set out above: that of *openness* to signals from non-human sources in social-ecological systems.

Conclusion

Effective environmental governance needs to be democratic, for the sake of both legitimacy within human systems and effective performance in an ecological context. Democracy in turn is best conceptualized in ways that emphasize its communicative rather than its aggregative aspects. With this conceptualization in mind, democracy can travel to contexts where elections are unavailable or problematic: notably, the global system, governance networks (including ones that transcend political boundaries), and interchanges with the non-human world. In all this, the idea of a deliberative system proves central.

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